

ABSTRACT

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PROMOTING PRESERVATION THROUGH
THE BEIJING OLYMPICS

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To many people in China, the 2008 Summer Olympics means much more than just an international sports event. Tens of thousands of urban construction projects are underway in this three-thousand-year-old city. Among the many large construction projects, there are numerous small preservation projects taking place quietly in Beijing's narrow streets. It is widely believed that the Beijing Olympics could be a political or social catalyst for protecting the physical integrity of heritage sites. At the same time, however, this support from the government and the public may also turn out to be a force to accelerate the process of gentrification and "beautification." Thus, the city could actually lose its cultural authenticity and integrity in the name of preservation. This paper examines actions taken to protect heritage sites in the context of the Beijing Olympics. I will analyze how a mega event like the Olympics can impact historic resources and to what extent preservation could benefit from this type of event.

KEEPING THE CHARM OF PEKING:
PROMOTING PRESERVATION THROUGH THE BEIJING OLYMPICS

By

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Dedication

To

My country and my people who suffered in Sichuan Earthquake

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Introduction

Beijing is one of the world's largest cities, and as the capital of China, the city attracts attention while inspiring controversy. In 2008, the city welcomes the Summer Olympic Games. The host city of an Olympic games has a once-in-a-life-time opportunity to be placed in the spotlight on the global stage. "The biggest winners of the Olympic windfall will be the political regimes running the city that have the opportunity to reshape the city's desired image."¹ It is widely believed that "the Beijing Olympic Games will be a perfect occasion to fully display China's 5000-year history and its resplendent cultures..."² Beijing is more than three thousand years old, and has served as a capital of the nation for more than 850 years. In many ways, the city speaks for the country. Although hosting and bidding for the Olympic Games may cost billions of dollars, cities like Beijing do not hesitate to make the investment.

The city of Beijing stands at a crossroads. In the past three decades, the Chinese people have made astonishing progress in the political and economic arenas; meanwhile the growing economy brings with it many social issues. Commodification in heritage areas confuses social identities of local residents, and globalization challenges the integrity of historic heritages. The 2008 International Olympics Committee recognizes the city as "an international metropolis and enhance national

¹ Paul Close, David Askew and Xu Xin, *The Beijing Olympiad: the Political Economy of a Sporting Mega-Event*, New York: Routledge, 2007 Page15

² Paul Close, David Askew and Xu Xin, *The Beijing Olympiad: the Political Economy of a Sporting Mega-Event*, New York: Routledge, 2007 Page15

pride,”³ while urging the government to break its bad habits. One area of concern is the destruction of unique and historic vernacular houses.

Since 1990, extensive real estate development has made its way into the old residential areas of the city.⁴ Unique vernacular houses along the thousands of the narrow streets have been demolished. The disappearance of the city’s architectural heritage has aroused local, national and international protests.⁵ To many local residents, Beijing’s built environment means not only their beloved homes, but also their collective cultural identities. In the context of bidding for and hosting the Olympics, Beijing’s government has started to realize the cultural, social, economic and even political values of those often forgotten historic sites, and has begun to engage in preservation or restoration of ancient structures, temples, and old residences. Therefore, in addition to being a national showcase of rapid economic growth—Beijing has tried to seize this opportunity to demonstrate its ancient charm. Thanks to newly enacted preservation regulations, numerous heritage sites have been preserved through government funded renovation and adaptive reuse projects.

While the physical aspect of historic resources is now receiving proper preservation attention, intangible heritage attached to the physical building structures is still facing a huge challenge. With market-driven and tourism-orientated

³ Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, *Beijing: from Imperial Capital to Olympic City*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 page 5

⁴ Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, *Beijing: from Imperial Capital to Olympic City*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 page 5

⁵ Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, *Beijing: from Imperial Capital to Olympic City*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 page 272

redevelopments underway, the city's historic neighborhoods have experienced ruthless gentrification.

Beijing is not the first nor will it be the last city to encounter the challenge of balancing the physical and cultural aspects of preservation. The Olympic Games are almost as well-known for its building competitions as for their athletic competitions. The games have been hosted in many historic cities, such as Athens, Barcelona, and Seoul, and countless masterpieces of modern architecture have been built in the context of the Olympic Games; many of these host cities have also made great efforts to preserve their cities' ancient charm. Lacking any obvious political and economic potential, the importance of preserving intangible heritages was generally forgotten. Are the Olympics a negative or positive for the modern preservation movement? What can future host cities learn from Beijing's experiences? These are among questions I will address in my research.

In the first chapter, I will examine news articles and newly published regulations to understand actions taken to protect heritage sites in the context of the Beijing Olympics. Using a case study, I will analyze how a mega event can impact historic resources and to what extent preservation could be promoted by this type of event. In Chapter 2, I will explore some of the sustainable approaches for preservation projects. The economic potentials of heritage tourism industry and adaptive reuse projects could help heritage sites survived before and after the Games. In Chapter 3, I will examine local popular support for the Beijing Games and assess the opportunity for

rising public awareness of preservation. Last but not least, I will examine the social issues that result from the marriage of the Games and preservation activities.

Problems with beautification, ruthless redevelopment, and gentrification needed to be understood and addressed. I will emphasize the importance of intangible cultural heritage in the final chapter.

Chapter 1: Public Policy: “Crouching Olympics, Hidden Preservation”⁶

Before 2000, the city of Beijing annually received no more than 10 million RMB Yuan (1.5 million US dollars) from the national government for preserving its historic sites.⁷ When it came to determining how to spend that money on the more than 500,000 sq meters of historic sites, including the Forbidden City and the Great Wall, it was clear that the funding was insufficient. The same year, Beijing started its second bid for the Olympic Games, and the city began what it called ‘The 330 Million Project.’ The city government allocated 110 million RMB yuan (USD 13.3 million) annually for three years in order to rescue hundreds of endangered heritage sites in Beijing. Thus, the city’s spending on its historic sites each year quickly exceeded the total amount that the nation spent in a single fiscal year for the same purpose.⁸

‘The 330 Million Project’ is much more than a fresh start for the city’s preservation efforts. With policy makers favoring preservation projects, one regulation triggers another. Millions of dollars in governmental investments were way beyond what local preservationists could have previously imagined. Additionally, the city government included in the legislation the option for private investment for adaptive reuse projects of historic sites, in order to encourage private sector

⁶ Yang, Andrew, “Crouching Olympics, Hidden Preservation” Architectural Record, Vol. 195, Issue 6 New York, McGraw-Hill, June 2007

⁷ Liu Qi, ed, Study on Beijing Olympic Economy (北京奥运经济研究) Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 2002 Page 693

⁸ Liu Qi, ed, Study on Beijing Olympic Economy (北京奥运经济研究) Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 2002 Page 693

involvement in preservation activities. To respond to this legislation, private investors generated more than 5 billion RMB yuan (USD 7.14 billion) in matching-funds.⁹ The money was used in relocating previous residents who lived in historic sites; hiring curators for the newly restored and reopened museums and sites; and of course rescuing almost a hundred endangered sites that had waited a long time to be well-preserved. By the end of 2003, the city had witnessed a major change in the field of preservation. Old temples had been repainted, more museums had opened to the public, and a preservation ethic was gradually emerging. Some of the highest profile developments then underway in Beijing preserve and incorporated old buildings.

In 2003, a brand new master plan, *'People's Olympic Historic Preservation Plan,'* was created by the city government.¹⁰ In this document, the city government plans to allocate 600 million RMB yuan (USD 85.7 million) of its revenue for preservation over the course of five years. The city also expects more than 1 billion RMB yuan in matching funding from both public and private sectors that will follow within the five year period.¹¹

The main focus of this city-wide plan has now shifted from rescuing individual historic sites to improving the overall historic appearance of the city's heritage areas. In 2005, the *Beijing Historical and Cultural Landmark Preservation Plan and Regulations* takes effect and will enhance the previous *'People's Olympic Historic*

⁹ Liu Yali, Beijing Preservation Effort: 330 Million Triggers 6 Billion *Beijing Modern Business Report* 6/1/ 2006 <http://www.shanzhuang.gov.cn/bsshanzhuang/ReadNews.asp?NewsID=872> (accessed on Feb 2nd 2008)

¹⁰ Liu Qi, ed, Study on Beijing Olympic Economy (北京奥运经济研究) Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 2002 Page 697

¹¹ Liu Qi, ed, Study on Beijing Olympic Economy (北京奥运经济研究) Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 2002 Page 697

Preservation Plan.’ According to this regulation, twenty-five historic districts in the Old City were established and city government should by all means preserve and restore all of the 25 historic districts by the end of 2007. Moreover, the regulation authorized that another group of 15 historic districts should be surveyed and registered. A second series of renovation projects will also focus on this group.¹² The new regulations restricted the land use within the old city wall, limited the height of new structures and preserved unobstructed views across the main axes of the ancient city. Adaptive reuse is also highly encouraged, while preservation rather than restoration (reconstruction) is recommended.¹³

Case Studies on Historic Commercial Areas

Wangfujing and Dashilan are two well-known historic commercial areas in Beijing, both located in the heart of the city. Wangfujing is just a few blocks east of the Forbidden City, while Dashilan is on the south edge of Tiananmen Square (see figure 1). In this case study, I examine the impact of political efforts on historic resources. In the magic hands of public policy, Wangfujing became a modernized shopping center, crowded with box-like, high rise commercial buildings, while Dashilan had a chance to reveal its historic appearance from the Qing Dynasty.

¹² The 12th Standing Committee of Beijing People's Congress “Measures for the Protection of the Historical and Cultural Landmark of Beijing”, <http://www.lawinfochina.com/Law/display.asp?id=4115&keyword=> (accessed on 3/14/2008)

¹³ The 12th Standing Committee of Beijing People's Congress “Measures for the Protection of the Historical and Cultural Landmark of Beijing”, <http://www.lawinfochina.com/Law/display.asp?id=4115&keyword=> (accessed on 3/14/2008)

Wangfujing was an excellent example of Chinese social change and economic development.¹⁴ Wangfujing in Chinese means “royal residence’s well.” In the Qing Dynasty, several members of the royal family chose the land to build their estates and residences. Later, a well of sweet water was discovered, thereby giving the street its name. In 1903, the Dong’an market was opened in Wangfujing. A folk poem published in 1909 described the market as so refreshing and appealing that no visitor to Beijing could miss it.¹⁵ The Dong’an market, along with hundreds of other local stores in Wangfujing commercial area, has remained prosperous throughout the 20th century. Although several modern high rises, such as the state-run Wangfujing Department Store, have been added to the skyline since the Communist party took over, only minor changes had been made to the overall architectural landscape. The real threat to the built environment appeared in 1992 when Mayor Chen Xitong put this most valuable piece of land in Beijing on the market and sold it to Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-Shing who planned a giant redevelopment project in the area.¹⁶ The big boxlike buildings of New Dong’an Market and Oriental Plaza (shown in figure 2) took the place of the eighty-seven-year-old Dong’an Market, (shown in Picture 3), hundreds of local shops, the first McDonald’s restaurant in Beijing, and a handful of historically and architecturally significant Royal residences, while the mega project also leveled an entire city block of vernacular houses where twelve thousand local residents had lived for generation after generation.¹⁷ At that time, the leaders of the

¹⁴ Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, *Beijing: from Imperial Capital to Olympic City*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 page 247

¹⁵ Sina Finance “History of Wangfujing” (September 2003)
<http://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/20030902/1123430399.shtml> (accessed on 3/14/2008)

¹⁶ Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, *Beijing: from Imperial Capital to Olympic City*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 page 248

¹⁷ Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, *Beijing: from Imperial Capital to Olympic City*, New

country saw the historic buildings as obstacles to promoting consumer development and business, and encouraged the redevelopment projects by all means. “In 1994, historic preservationists managed to halt construction by reporting that the design violated building codes in the capital.”¹⁸ Later, Premier Li Peng intervened in the conflict, the Oriental Plaza project was soon approved by the State Council after some modest adjustments.¹⁹ The project eventually cost \$2 billion US dollars.²⁰ These large boxlike buildings were topped with small pavilion-like towers which were supposed to be symbols of Chinese heritage. Ironically, the only historic building that survived over the years of redevelopment is a western style Catholic Church.²¹

While the Oriental Plaza project resulted in destruction of the historic environment, the Dashilan project, as one of preservation efforts stated in ‘*People’s Olympic Historic Preservation Plan*’, took a very different approach. In 2008, Dashilan will resume its appearance as the busiest commercial area in the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Dashilan means “Big Fence” in Chinese. In the late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Beijing started to build fences both in commercial and residential areas for security reasons. In order to protect their famous stores, restaurants and commercial banks, Dashilan’s business owners contributed a great amount of money to build these fences. Thus, the fences in this part of the city are

York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 page 248

¹⁸ Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, Beijing: from Imperial Capital to Olympic City, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 page 248

¹⁹ Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, Beijing: from Imperial Capital to Olympic City, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 page 248

²⁰ Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, Beijing: from Imperial Capital to Olympic City, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 page 249

²¹ Beijing Travel Guide “Shopping in Beijing: Wangfujing Street”

http://www.virtualltourist.com/travel/Asia/China/Beijing_Shi/Beijing-1024960/TravelGuide-Beijing.html (accessed on April 1st 2008)

much bigger than the rest and people started to call the area “big fence” instead of its previous name. It did not take too long to have the name finally registered in official records. As stated in *Measures for the Protection of the Historical and Cultural Landmark of Beijing*, Dashilan is an excellent sample of local commercial tradition. The time-honored stores and restaurants have encapsulated Beijing’s folk life and cultural heritage (figure 4). For the renovation of the Dashilan area, the Chongwen District government proposed to save the majority of the old houses instead of tearing them down. The total investment from the district government exceeds 9.32 million RMB yuan (USD 1.33 million).²² In the guidelines for the project, proper preservation measures, adaptive reuse and sustainable designs are recommended, clearly indicating the changes in stakeholders’ attitudes towards historic resources. In order to maximally display the historical and cultural features of the Dashilan commercial area, a panel of 32 specialists went through every house to evaluate its historic significance and determine preservation measures (figure 5).²³ According to *Xinhua News Agency*, “some 100 buildings along the street have been selected, including time-honored shops and hutongs (alleyways), to be protected.”²⁴ The preservation plan for Dashilan Street has even included two trolleys.²⁵ Two 12-meter-long special tracks were purchased from Tianjin, in order to operate the

²² Sina News “Renovation Project in Dashilan Starts” (11-09-2007)

<http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2007-11-09/155314272721.shtml> (Accessed on 3/1/2008)

²³ The Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad “Qianmen Street to recover old time aspect” (2008-02-19) <http://en.beijing2008.cn/news/olympiccities/beijing/antique/s214239393/n214253144.shtml> (Accessed on 3/1/2008)

²⁴ The Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad “Qianmen Street to recover old time aspect” (2008-02-19) <http://en.beijing2008.cn/news/olympiccities/beijing/antique/s214239393/n214253144.shtml> (Accessed on 3/1/2008)

²⁵ The Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad “Qianmen Street” <http://en.beijing2008.cn/news/olympiccities/beijing/antique/s214239393/n214239885.shtml> (Accessed on 3/1/2008)

old-fashioned trolleys.²⁶ The vehicles had been absent for half a century, but the sound of their bells will be heard again along both sides of the street.

In 2008, The Dashilan will become a vehicle-free promenade. Some of the old building materials from torn down structures will be reused in the renovation projects, while some of new decorative details are being added to the streetscape. Birdcage like street lamps and many more amenities might seems appealing to tourists, but some architectural historian have criticized the design as more beautification rather preservation orientated.

Comparing these two commercial areas, it is not hard to see the changes in public policy. The power of public policy led the fates of these two market places in two completely different directions. The Olympic Games were a turning point for the preservation projects. With decades of opening-up, the Chinese government slowly realized that saving historic buildings is not purely a waste of money, but a “profitable” investment. The cultural, economic and political values that come along with restored historic buildings would not only enhance national pride, but also bring international recognition of the country’s growing efforts on protecting human heritage in the global community. Moreover, thanks to recent measures to flush out government corruption, the stakeholders are more careful about greenlighting every new development.²⁷ For the preservationists, there is no better time to advocate for

26 The Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad “Qianmen Street to recover old time aspect” <http://en.beijing2008.cn/news/olympiccities/beijing/antique/s214239393/n214253144.shtml> (Accessed on 3/1/2008)

27 Yang, Andrew, “Crouching Olympics, Hidden Preservation” Architectural Record, Vol. 195, Issue 6 New York, McGraw-Hill, June 2007

preservation activities, emphasize the economic values behind preservation and educate the public of the importance of heritage sites.

Through a review of enacted regulations and case studies, we can see the public policy influence on historic preservation. In most countries, the government is still in charge of taking care of most of the nation's historic resources. In this case, a favorable preservation attitude among policymakers is definitely a healthy sign for the preservation movement. It could be said that a mega event like the Olympic Games is truly a political catalyst to improve management of historic resources and enhance the importance of historic preservation. However, most preservation projects taking place in Beijing are privileging the physical aspects of the historic resources. Similarly, the economic values of heritage are overshadowing the cultural values. As a result, much of the authenticity and integrity of the cultural heritage has been left out. The social issues and debates focusing on the more intangible culture heritage will be discussed in detail in the last chapter.

Chapter 2: Economic Values: Manufacturing Heritage

The five rings of the Olympic Games is one of the most recognizable images on this planet. With over 90% popularity, the five rings beat almost every world-known famous brand's logo, even McDonald's golden arches.²⁸ It is widely believed that the Olympic Games are a gigantic public relations boost for Beijing, and of course China. In addition to the political windfall, the economic benefits that come along with the Games are also extremely noticeable. With the government now on board, heritage sites proved that they can sustain themselves by catering to the tourism industry and being the media of adaptive reuse projects. While the five-rings, mega commercial celebrated the market-driven preservation activities in Beijing, some intangible aspects of heritage were being neglected.

The Olympic Games are a huge business opportunity for the tourism industry. Millions of visitors are coming to participate in the Games, have fun in the city, and spend money during the event. What is even more important is that visitors will keep coming after the Games. Many Olympic host cities have witnessed large increases in tourism revenue. In the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, the number of international visitors was 225,000. Four years later, in the developing South Korean capital, the number was in the neighborhood of 220,000 and their tourism revenue reached 1.4 billion US dollars. The 1992 Barcelona Olympics attracted more than 300,000

²⁸ Paul Close, David Askew and Xu Xin, *The Beijing Olympiad: the Political Economy of a Sporting Mega-Event*, New York: Routledge, 2007 Page5

international visitors and 3 billion US dollars in tourism revenue.²⁹ With each new Olympics, the numbers are getting bigger and bigger. The State of Georgia received 3.5 billion US dollars from tourism while Atlanta was hosting the Olympic Games in 1996. The Centennial Olympic Game in Sydney in 2000 was a record breaker. In some ten days of the Games, more than 250,000 international visitors rushed into the city of Sydney. In addition to this crowd, not less than one million visitors have come to Sydney in the period from 1997 to 2000. The city's total tourism revenue was some 4.3 billion US dollars.³⁰

According to *China Sport News*, Beijing's tourism industry has earned 3.4 billion US dollars from international visitors exclusively in 2005. The Beijing Tourism Bureau predicts that number will increase to 5 billion. Moreover, thanks to the summer Olympics, the number of domestic visitors coming to Beijing is also expected to increase by 5%. In 2010, more than 110 million domestic travelers will visit Beijing, and they will bring around 17.6 billion US dollars.³¹

The city's heritage sites can benefit most directly from the Olympic Games through admission revenue and souvenirs sales to visitors. Additionally, the Games will also nurture local businesses within the heritage areas. Stores and restaurants selling local goods could earn some money while sustaining the folk arts and cultures. The tourism industry also triggers and supports new interpretation of heritage sites.

²⁹ Wang Chang, Miao Chunying, Beijing 2008, Taipei: Da Di Chu Ban She, 2001 (Print in Traditional Chinese) Page 43

³⁰ Wang Chang, Miao Chunying, Beijing 2008, Taipei: Da Di Chu Ban She, 2001 (Print in Traditional Chinese) Page 43

³¹ "Beijing, Are You Ready for Olympics Tourism?" *China Sport News*, (6/17/2004), <http://www.51766.com/articles/18547.html> (Accessed on 2/25/2008)

However, some preservationists blame the tourism industry for a too conscience desire for beautification and commodification. Yet, no one can deny that the huge amount of money that tourists bring into the area does help preserving the vernacular houses in Beijing when the city government falls short of funding.

Case Study on “Go To Hutong” Trail

Hutong, an ancient city alley, is a typical architectural feature in Beijing’s urban landscape. There are some thousands of hutongs that weave the square-like vernacular houses together that make the city plan of Beijing so unique. Unfortunately, the ancient tranquil and one-story housing style is incompatible with modern Beijing’s population growth. Only a few blocks of vernacular houses with several hutongs have survived the decades of urban redevelopment. With rising interest in heritage tourism, more and more visitors have begun to seek out the local tastes of the city. In this case study, I will explore how heritage tourism engages in preserving local businesses and cultural heritage.

It all began when some foreign visitors tired of the royal lifestyle that the Forbidden City represents, and tried to explore some local hutongs. The guided tour of central Beijing usually stops at the Prince Gong’s garden for lunch and bathroom break. Somehow, visitors on the tour managed to use their free time to wander around the old neighborhood and discovered a totally different world where all the humble and friendly local people lived. Smart tour guides quickly learned that chatting with local people and tasting traditional home-made dinners are more attractive to visitors

than anything else they had done during their trip. Starting in the mid-1990s when the tourism market was opened up, Hutong tourism was served on the menu.³² Since most of the hutongs are too narrow for tour buses or mini vans, the ancient man-powered tricycles came to the rescue (figure 6). Thus, a pair of visitors could ride with a well-trained driver watching the “live show” of local people and their beautiful homes. By the end of 20th century, hutongs were the one of the “must-see” places for tourists of Beijing. More than a dozen of these tours have been designed since then. The driver of the tricycle talks about anecdotes and history of the neighborhood in multiple languages. Visiting local families and having lunch with the local residents in their vernacular houses are also part of the tour (figure 7). The tour cost for one person is usually around 100 US dollars,³³ which equals a monthly salary for a blue collar worker in Beijing. Small wonder that people in the area believe tourism is the way to keep the houses alive. While local residents earned some cash for hosting their friendly visitors, local business owners took advantage of the tourists to promote sales. Receiving tens of thousands of visitors each day, Shichahai, as the start point of a typical Hutong tour, has witnessed a major “bar” boom since the Hutong tourism began. At the turn of the 20th century, some 80 bars were opened in the area. On the summer nights, the shining lights of those fancy bars mingle with the breeze from the inner city lake, making Shichahai the hottest night life spot in Beijing.

³² Wang, Ning, Vernacular House As an Attraction: Illustration from Hutong Tourism in Beijing. *Tourism Management* page 573-580

³³ <http://www.beijingfeeling.com/xinxi/shownews.asp?id=585>

Hutong tourism not only supports the preservation of traditional culture, but also nurtures the birth of new culture. The tourism revenue supports renovation of vernacular architecture, with tourism as a force that is turning historic vernacular houses into attractions. However, some critics blame the tourism industry for transforming the local resident's lives into museum exhibits. The commodification of the folk culture disturbs and spoils the authenticity and integrity of local community. The streamlining Hutong tours changes the initial goal of these tours which is the discovery of the real life in Beijing. The tricycle did lead the tourists into the historic neighborhoods through conversation with the local home owners and conservation of the historic houses, but is it the real deal anymore?

In addition to the tourism effort, the city government also seeks chances to adaptively reuse historic sites which could be beneficial to both sides. Before the Olympics, Beijing has had some spontaneous adaptive reuse projects. Among them, the 798 factory was the most famous one, turning a Bauhaus style half-century-old machine factory into an art district (figure 8).

At first, a group of artists followed the low rental price to the abandoned factory, where they preserved old slogans on the wall from Mao period, and used the workshop as their studio and gallery. Soon another group of national and international visitors followed the artists to the factory, because of the creative art works and nostalgic atmosphere that previous group generated. Then some world-class art galleries and publishing houses followed the flow of visitors and opened their offices

in the factory. Spontaneously, the 798 factory art district became a well-know fashionable attraction instead of a useless machine factory. Now, the real estate developers could follow the smell of cash to the factory.

The experience with the 798 factory taught the city government a lesson: they can preserve historic resources without spending a dime by inviting more players into the playground. In order to encourage this recycling approach, the city government has developed the working principal that “the one preserves it, benefits from it.”³⁴ Under this principal, the city government opened up its restrictions on proposals for adaptive reuse projects on many historic sites. Vernacular houses were purchased by private owners and developers who planed to reuse them as high-end restaurants, artist lofts, private firms and many more.

As mentioned in previous chapter, in the Dashilan commercial area the city government also hoped to get dozens of business owners and real estate developers to sign renovation contracts which allowed them to use the historic buildings for commercial uses while having them pay the bill for renovation. As a result, a 4-acre estate that once housed a foreign diplomat, will be turned into “an upscale retail and entertainment property.”³⁵ On the other side of the street, a historic landmark mix of Chinese and Victorian architecture will reopen to the public as a restaurant for chef Daniel Bouloud (figure 9).³⁶ However, with the dramatically increased prices of the

³⁴ Liu Qi, ed, Study on Beijing Olympic Economy (北京奥运经济研究) Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 2002 Page 688

³⁵ Yang, Andrew, “Crouching Olympics, Hidden Preservation” Architectural Record, Vol. 195, Issue 6 New York, McGraw-Hill, June 2007

³⁶ Yang, Andrew, “Crouching Olympics, Hidden Preservation” Architectural Record, Vol. 195, Issue 6 New York,

land, many time-honored stores that were relocated during the restoration work have difficulties in moving back to their original locations.

In the 20th century, preserving the physical shape of a historic building was the core of the preservation movement. At the turning of a new century, more and more preservationists realized that cultural heritage in and around the architecture itself should also be protected. The huge funding brought in by the tourism industry and adaptive reuse projects might help preserve the physical structures while evicting the previous cultures that reside in the old structures. Thus, actions such as renovation of the whole heritage area might destroy intangible cultural heritage in the name of preservation. Social issues raised by the gentrification and inappropriate relocation measures that came along with preservation projects will be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: Educational Shortcut: Rising Public Awareness of Preservation

Liu Qi, the Mayor of Beijing, pointed out that over 95% of the city's population supports the Olympics bid—because they believe that hosting the 2008 Olympic Games will help raise their quality of life.³⁷ Influenced by the Olympic popularity, it is also a good time to educate the public that historic building may not be a burden, but rather a treasure for their community. In order to promote an exchange of rich Chinese culture with other cultures in the context the 2008 Olympics, both the architectural blueprint and the intangible heritage of this historic city must be saved.

The preservation movement in China grew in the early 21st century. Many journalists, urban planners and preservationists have dedicated themselves to a race with bulldozers. There were times that they lost, but more than often their die hard spirit has encouraged more and more attention and action. Maybe China can not teach us how to balance historic preservation and the extension of post-modern urban neighborhood. However, the grassroots endeavors on how to educate the public about the preservation of existing structures are critical not only for China, but also for the rest of the world. Thus, it is worth taking some time to acknowledge those brightest stars of preservation and their efforts.

³⁷ Paul Close, David Askew and Xu Xin, *The Beijing Olympiad: the Political Economy of a Sporting Mega-Event*, New York: Routledge, 2007 Page95

Journalist Wang Jun, a Chinese version of Jane Jacobs, is considered as sparking China's preservation movement. His 2003 book, *The Story of A City*, "has been at the top of Beijing's bestseller list ever since, and has triggered a new wave of discussion on urban planning in the capital."³⁸ Wang Jun highlighted the forgotten heritage of Liang Sicheng, an urban planner active in the 1950s. The rediscovered plan of Liang Sicheng is actually a modern way of preserving the past while integrating the new. Wang Jun tried to explore the architectural mechanism of historic Beijing. He argues that Clarence Perry's super blocks and "city planning for cars" could not match Beijing's layout. If Beijing torn down its historic houses, in order to give way to a car oriented society, the city will eventually lose its ancient charm. He also emphasized on many occasions that "individual architecture is far less important to humankind than the intangible heritage encapsulated within the old neighborhood."

Professor Ruan Yisan, emeritus professor of Urban Planning in School of Architecture and Urban Planning, at Tongji University, has made a major contribution to the education and research of historic preservation. In an interview with CCTV, the China's national television, Professor Ruan Yisan admitted that there were times he used his own saving as an initial funding for preservation project in historic towns, in order to convince the city officials to "buy" into his preservation concept. Thanks to his good relationship with the central government, he has advocated and initiated many preservation plans and regulations in historic cities such

³⁸ Lin Gu "Battle over Beijing"(9-15-2004) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/3657008.stm> (Accessed on 4/23/2008)

as Pingyao, Zhouzhuang, Tongli, and Luzhi.³⁹ He has successfully helped safeguard many historic cities and towns from ruthless development and made them important heritage sites through preservation planning and practice. Under his supervision, the project of the Yangtze River Water Towns (including Zhouzhuang, Tongli, Luzhi, Nanxun, Wuzhen and Xitang) was granted the Award of Distinction by the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation in 2003.

Grassroots preservation efforts are coming from all directions. Not only were the local scholars and intellectuals fighting the rapid pace of urban development, but local residents in Beijing were also finding their way into saving intangible heritage. Folklife festivals gave the local residents opportunities to celebrate their own culture and folk life. Thanks to the Olympics, many non-profit organizations were also established in Beijing and China in the past decade. And more and more nation-wide and international conferences and lectures have been held with regard to preservation issues.

In a recent seminar, *Planning for a Chinese Century*, at the National Building Museum in Washington D.C. Wang Jun shared his concern about the tension between cultural preservation and China's plans for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Paul Goldberger, the architecture critic for the *New Yorker*, also remarked during the seminar that the Olympics have historically been a building competition almost as much as an athletics competition, however, unlike the athletics event, those buildings

³⁹ "Ruan Yisan: The Catcher in Historic Cities", The Bund (07-08-2006)
<http://www.memoryofchina.org/meizhouyixing/2006/0708/118.html> (accessed on April 29, 2008)

would stay around after the 16 days of sporting event. Ma Liangwei, deputy director of Beijing Planning Commission, also pointed out that as China's economy expands at an extraordinary pace, there is a growing recognition within the Chinese government of the need for smarter growth and urban planning.

It is clear that education and exchange of thoughts are critical for preservation. Like many preservationists, I believed that people would fall in love with the idea of preservation if they knew better. Wang Jun said: "we were starting off on the wrong foot. What happened to US in 1970s, is exactly what happening right now in China, highways, traffic jams, super blocks and urban sprawl." However, thanks to advanced technology, we now have a better chance to catch the fire before it spreads too far. At the speed of light, the modern world is moving forward; so is the preservation movement.

Chapter 4: Social Issues: Preservation For Whom?

China is a developing country. Hundreds of construction projects take place in Beijing everyday. Changes not only happened to the city's physical appearance, but also occurred in social and cultural aspects. As stated in the first two chapters, Beijing's preservation movement has witnessed a major makeover in the public policy and economic arenas. With more focused educational opportunities, the public awareness of preservation is reaching new heights. However, the question remains: what will happen to the city after the Summer Games? Will the city's heritage sites receive the same awareness in the future? Will the real estate industry slow down in the post games period? To what extend could a new Beijing grow over the old one? Furthermore, problems with beatification, Disney-like redevelopment, and gentrification are also waiting to be answered. In this chapter, I will try to explore some downsides of the event and warn the next host cities to help them avoid making the same mistakes.

Dilemma of Displaying Culture

After the breakout of Tibet riots in March, Chinese government suddenly realized that there is a downside to the Olympics. Instead of a glorified showcase, the Games could be a face-losing disaster if the government ignored the norms of preserving the minority's heritage. Focusing too much on the physical (or economic) aspect of the country, the regime found itself in a social and cultural quagmire. Hungry for the "soft power", China tried to catch up with its rivals by any means. Unfortunately, there is no shortcut to the top. Neither developing nor developed

countries are exempt from various social issues when it comes to urban development. However, the difficulties should not prevent China from pushing forward until it finds its own best practice.

As stated in the first chapter, the Games are a political catalyst for preservation in terms of improving the physical shape of historic sites. Public policy towards historic buildings has changed dramatically, and the real estate industry also followed up this trend. With the policy privileging physical preservation, the economic aspect of preservation was fully revealed. Many successful makeovers convinced the tourism industry and real estate industry that historic preservation could be a profitable business. With more and more players rushing into the business, the economic potentials of historic sites overshadowed the social and cultural values of the sites. In the case of Beijing, heritage tourism and adaptive reuse projects accelerate the process of commodification of local culture and gentrification of the old neighborhood.

Displaying cultural heritage is never an easy task. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the visitors on the Hutong tour brought in tourism revenues to the area while also increasing the real estate values of the sites. Some local residents may no longer be able to afford the cost of living within tourism attractions, while others may simply have earned enough from the “culture display” business to move out their over-crowded houses to more suburban locations. The authenticity of the sites on the Hutong tour has been challenged ever since the site became known as tourist

destination. As time has passed by, today's Hutong visitors may see a totally different world than they might have seen a decade ago. The identity of the place was losing in commodification.

Projects like Dashilan, I have mentioned in Chapter 2, may keep the historic appearance of a commercial street, while destroying intangible heritage through replacing its old residents and the time-honored local businesses in the name of preservation. It seems true that Dashilan may be ten times more profitable as an exhibition of a commercial area than it was as a commercial area. However, what visitors saw and experienced in Dashilan may no longer be the reason why they came in the first place. Beautification and Disney-like reconstruction are not ethical from modern preservation perspective. What is worse, the tourists might easily tire of "fake" culture. When the time comes, without the "real" neighborhood inhabited in the historic area, those "fake" historic buildings would be left out deteriorating again.

Property Rights vs. Gentrification

According to the property rights policy in China, the homeowner only has the ownership of the building above the ground, while the state owns all of the land. When it comes to mega construction projects, the homeowners demand just compensation and appropriate resettlement. However, without actual ownership to the land, their voices were neglected more often than not. That is why the demolition of the old houses and relocation of previous residents always raises conflicts over legitimate rights and interests of the homeowners.

An estimated 300,000 residents have been displaced by the Olympic building effort in Beijing.⁴⁰ This number includes those who left their houses for historic preservation projects. Due to the low cost of resettlement, real estate developers would rather take a risk on investing in preservation redevelopment projects which generates another problem: gentrification. Gentrification describes a process in which physically deteriorated neighborhoods attract an influx of investment and undergo physical renovation. Due to an increase in property values in most cases, the previous lower-income residents who occupied the neighborhood can no longer afford to live there and are being displaced, while more affluent people are being introduced into the area.⁴¹ The massive redevelopment projects are usually accompanied by gentrification. The displacement of the old neighborhood dilutes the historic area's social and cultural identity. Losing the old customers, local businesses are also negatively affected. Many cities in U.S. also suffer from the same problems. On every Sunday morning, Washington D. C. witnesses a large flow of Black church-goers drove in Georgetown in order to worship in their churches which used to be just around the corner for them before the gentrification. Various attempts have been made to control gentrification, such as zoning ordinance, rental control and community land trust. However, since the homeowners in Beijing do not own the land, there will not be a solution fighting against gentrification until the government stops privileging massive redevelopment project.

⁴⁰ Yang, Andrew "Crouching Olympics, Hidden Preservation", *Architectural Record*, Jun2007, Vol. 195, Issue 6

⁴¹ Merriam-Webster, "Gentrification" <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gentrification> (accessed on May 1, 2008)

Conclusion

An Olympiad has never before been held in a city as rapidly developing as Beijing. The 2008 Summer Olympic Games are serving as a catalyst to promote historic preservation that is expected to continue long after the Games. What we could learn from the Beijing experiences are as following:

- 1) Public policy has a huge influence on the preservation movement. It could encourage more players into the preservation activities and generate a big chunk of funding. However, every coin has two sides. A policy focusing exclusively on physical aspects of preservation could accelerate the process of gentrification. The tourism industry may rescue the physical shape of a historic building, while speeding up the demolition of the intangible heritage inhabited in it.
- 2) There were times when the economic value of historic preservation had been underestimated. However, it is not the case in Beijing anymore. The businesses of heritage tourism and adaptive reuse development are so big that people cannot think of a way to stop exploiting the economic potentials of historic sites. It can be said that the economic values of preservation are overshadowing its social and cultural values. If we do not understand and take actions right now, it will be too late to get started. Once the old neighborhoods are displaced and the time-honored stores are broken into pieces, it is impossible to repair them again. It is a critical moment for preservation all over the world.

- 3) Mega events such as the Olympics are a great opportunity for preservation advocacy and education. As part of the city's pride, the rich cultural heritage could fit into almost every theme of the event. Thus, preservationists should utilize their resources to educate the public about the importance of the historic sites as well as intangible culture.

For many host cities, the Olympics have proved to be an opportunity to rescue forgotten historic sites and cultural heritages. Inevitably, hopes are high before the Games—zoning regulations and preservation laws enacted, a preservation boom occurs—but when the five ring flag has been passed to the next city, expectations may fail to be realized. However, there are ways to buck this trend, with grassroots efforts and academic aid and international scholars' advice, the government is expected to realize the social and cultural value behind the physical shape of historic buildings gradually. Just as Beijing used this once-in-a-life-time opportunity to recover its historic appearance, the city also could find its charms on the way of the Olympics.

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